Hot Off the Grill: Great Food That's Also Good for You

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Tomatoes from the garden, sweet corn, steak seared on the grill. Could there be a more perfect summer meal? Yes, but only if you know the healthiest ways to indulge your barbecue habit. Good bet you've heard murmurs about grilled meat causing -- yes -- cancer and either tried not to listen or guiltily thought, well, what doesn't? But here's the good news: There are a bunch of ways to virtually wipe out the risk. In fact, we've found eight of them!

The problem, by the way, is that grilling meat, chicken, and fish -- especially if it's charred or well done -- produces cancer-linked chemicals known as HCAs or HAAs. Animal fat dripping on hot coals creates another worry: stuff called PAHs. But you don't have to go flame-free. Just do one or more of the following, which actually tend to make grilled food taste even better.

Is it worth it? You bet: Besides eliminating the guilt, making healthful substitutions when cooking can make your RealAge 3 years younger.

1. Soak it up. Marinating meat boosts flavor and tenderness while slashing production of cancer-causing HCAs by up to 90%, especially if the marinade has an olive oil base. Make your own or just use bottled Italian dressing zinged up with extra garlic.

2. Do kabobs. Small pieces of meat cook faster and produce fewer HCAs than caveman-size slabs do. Thread your protein of choice on a skewer with lots of veggies (cherry tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms, zucchini chunks, onions) and grill until just done.

3. Add a secret ingredient. Making burgers? Mix in 1 teaspoon of wheat bran per pound of ground meat. It keeps burgers juicy, stops HCAs in their tracks, and won't even register on the carb meter.

4. Finish it fast. Precook meat in the oven, microwave, or on the stove earlier in the day, then finish on the grill for great flavor and those tempting stripes. It also means people aren't waiting around for ages while dinner cooks.

5. Foiled again. Cover the grate with punctured tinfoil. No flames, no drips, no HCAs -- and no grill clean-up either. Flipping your meat of choice frequently also helps curtail troublemakers.

6. Get skinny. Trim fat from meat to curtail dripping. Cook chicken with the skin on, then toss the skin. You have nothing to lose but grease, calories, and carcinogens.

7. Have a glass of tea. How about some iced tea with your baby back ribs? Tea's supercharged antioxidants help neutralize carcinogens.

8. Grill something besides the main course. Bored with broccoli? Sick of sliced fruit? Throw them on the grill. Fruits and veggies don't produce carcinogens and many, from pears to pineapple, take surprisingly well to the brazier. Some ideas:

- Marinate portobello mushrooms in French dressing and grill like burgers.
- Serve flame-broiled radicchio brushed with olive oil and orange juice.
- Or for dessert, try these super-easy Grilled Peach Sundaes from our friends at Eating Well.

We guarantee you won't miss the beef.